

# **CENTRAL AFRICAN YOUNG FEMINISTS FORUM**

## **National Feminist Forum (Congo Brazzaville)**

The Central Africa Young Feminist Forum was held from 8th to 10th February 2012 in Congo Brazzaville. This Forum was attended by 39 young and not so young feminists from 5 West and Central African countries as follows: 3 from Cameroon; 2 from the Central African Republic; 9 from the Democratic Republic of Congo; 23 from the Republic of Congo; 1 from Chad and 1 from Ghana. Participants included women's rights activists, women and girls from rural areas; women living with HIV/AIDS, women living with disabilities, LGBTI and sex workers. The theme of the meeting was "Redefining human security, sexuality and young women's rights in Central Africa".

## **COUNTRY CONTEXT**

Countries in Central Africa have gone through social crisis or conflicts, and the rights of women and girls in these countries have been affected by such events. The issues of human security, violence against women and girls, human rights, sexual rights and reproductive rights of women living with HIV/AIDS also affect girls, young women and women in Central Africa. There is, however, very little information on sub-regional actions on these issues, and even the contribution of young women in this area has not been adequately documented and supported.

This Forum fits into the continuity of country-level action of the African Feminist Forum (AFF)

The feminist movement in Central Africa is still at its embryonic stage.

Three feminists in the Central African Sub region participated in the African Feminist Forum (AFF) but there has not been any collaboration since the Forum or any joint activities in the countries.

There are young feminists in these countries that have begun sharing experiences and working together on certain themes, but who do not have any knowledge of the feminists charter formulated by the African Feminist Forum and lack a framework of sharing experiences and acting on crucial problems facing them as well their peers in the society.

With the growing influence of religious fundamentalism, homophobic laws (in the case of Cameroon and the DRC on homosexuality) and continued violence against women and girls, it is essential for young feminists to meet, share, document and learn from one another. This includes strategising on how to initiate and reinforce the movement at national levels.

## **REDEFINING HUMAN SECURITY, SEXUALITY AND THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN**

The following topics were addressed during the Forum:

- ✓ Presentation of the 1st Forum of Young Feminists in Central Africa (Congo and DRC).
- ✓ Introduction to feminism and background of the African Feminist Forum (Ghana).
- ✓ Human Security (DRC).
- ✓ Conflicts and militarisation (DRC and CAR).
- ✓ Challenges of legislation of sex rights and reproductive health (Cameroon and Congo).
- ✓ Family planning, abortion and adolescent sexuality (Cameroon, Congo and DRC).
- ✓ Sexual violence (Congo).
- ✓ Presentation on the African Feminists Charter and code of feminist organisations.
- ✓ Gender inequality in the family code and criminal code (Congo and CAR)
- ✓ Religious fundamentalisms (Chad).
- ✓ Presentation on experiences in promoting the rights of women living with disability (Congo).
- ✓ Participation of young women in Politics (Congo and DRC).
- ✓ Follow up plan of the Forum (all countries)

## **KEY FORUM OBJECTIVES**

This Forum of Young Feminists was aimed at achieving the following objectives:

- ✓ Promoting the African Feminists Charter among young feminists in the sub- region ; and
- ✓ Building capacity of young feminists to collaborate on issues of human security, sexuality and rights of young women in the sub-region.

## **FORUM METHODOLOGY**

The workshop adopted a participatory approach; there were talks from resource persons and participants on specific topics followed by questions to the experts and sharing of experiences.

There was a “chat show”, workshops and practical group work. Participants remarked that “*the method used on the 1st day was good*”; “*the reception was warm*”, “*the facilitators were wonderful*”, and “*the group works were a good initiative*”.

## KEY OUTCOMES OF THE FORUM

<b>Immediate outcomes of the Young Feminists Forum of Central Africa.</b>
The Charter of Feminist principles was adopted by all the 39 participants at the Forum and recommendations were made of the dissemination strategies.
A coordination team of the steering committee made up of young feminists from the sub region was set up. It includes: A Coordinator: Philomène Mukendi (DRC) Deputy Coordinator: Jospéhine Mandeng Mbeng (Cameroun) Finance Officer: Ida Moussa (Congo) Secretary : Anna Zoumai (Chad)
A regional steering committee of the Young Feminists Forum of Central Africa was set up
A Facebook page for “Young Feminists” was created before the Forum. This page now needs to be adequately promoted amongst forum participants and other feminists in the Sub region. At least four blog articles were posted on: <a href="http://fr.africanfeministforum.com/">http://fr.africanfeministforum.com/</a> National press houses (Les Dépêches de Brazzaville, Congo Site published articles on the Young Feminists Forum while the national television channel (Tele Congo and DRTV, a private channel) also gave it media coverage. An interview was granted on the pan-African channel 3A Telesud on the Forum.
AWDF urged participants to submit grant proposals before the end of the month of March 2012 to be considered for grants to subsidise their movement building programmes. Participants committed to carry on monitoring key issues in their respective countries. The monitoring will be spear headed by the sub regional working committee.

### Follow up Agenda

#### Identification of a common theme of advocacy to be carried out at the sub regional level, and formulation of a monitoring plan for this advocacy.

Theme	Objectives	Targets	Actions
Formulate an advocacy document of the situation of women and girls regarding early and unwanted pregnancy	Formulate a document on the advocacy of the situation of women and girls regarding early and unwanted pregnancy Make public institutions	Targets : Ministry of Health, Ministry of Women’s Affairs, Ministry of Planning and Organisation of the Civil society	Form working groups per country and sub region Have reliable and convincing country data which can be published.

	face up to their responsibilities.		
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**Creation of a Sub-regional Working Group of Young Women Feminists from Central Africa and a short term working plan.**

Participants in Central Africa decided that the Feminist Forums of the sub-region will be monitored by two structures; a sub regional working committee and country focal points.

**✓ The Sub Regional Working committee :**

A decision was taken to set up a sub regional working committee made up of representatives from each country. This committee will, from among its members, elect a Coordinator, a Deputy Coordinator, a Finance Officer and a Secretary for a 3 year term which shall be renewable once.

Ordinary meetings will be held every quarter, while extraordinary meetings will be held in case of any emergency. The working committee will use information communication technologies to ensure better communication. The task of the Working Committee will be to organise biennial Feminist Forums on a rotational basis in countries across the sub region.

**✓ Committee of Focal Points :**

Focal points are selected at the country level and assist members of the Working committee in the countries. Their mandate is for 3 years and is renewable once.

**✓ Roles and Responsibilities of the Working Committee**

<b>Position</b>	<b>Responsibilities</b>
Sub regional Coordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Coordinate sub regional activities.</li> <li>✓ Recommend participants for the various forums.</li> <li>✓ Mobilise and source for funding</li> <li>✓ Engage the sub region.</li> <li>✓ Produce reports to members of the committees from other countries and to the Steering Committee of the African Feminist Forum</li> </ul>
Deputy Coordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Acts in the absence of the Coordinator.</li> <li>✓ Oversees projects and programmes of the sub region.</li> </ul>
Secretary :	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Receive and send mails.</li> <li>✓ Prepare the agenda of meetings and forums of the sub region.</li> <li>✓ Prepare reports to be submitted to the Coordinator for onward distribution.</li> </ul>

Finance Officer:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Manage the resources (deposits/ withdrawals).</li> <li>✓ Control the movement of funds and expenditure.</li> <li>✓ Propose a manual of financial procedures.</li> </ul>
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### Country action plan.

Country	Theme	Actions
Cameroun	Adolescent sex education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ State of affairs</li> <li>✓ National workshop</li> </ul>
Congo	Family planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ State of affairs</li> <li>✓ Advocacy sensitisation training workshop.</li> </ul>
CAR		
DRC		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ State of affairs on sexual violence in the provinces and adolescent sexuality.</li> <li>✓ Workshop with students and doctors</li> </ul>
Chad	HIV/AIDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Training of health workers on human rights</li> </ul>

### ✓ **Monitoring mechanisms- evaluation of actions**

Each country will submit a progress report after 3 months

### ✓ **Non financial resources needed**

The resources needed include documents, contacts, information, and proposals of existing projects with a feminist approach.

### **Strengthening the Feminist Movement in Central Africa.**

There is an existing Feminist Movement in Central Africa though the level of commitment is still low.

Challenges facing the Feminist movement in Central Africa	Strategies to strengthen the movement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Leadership within the women's organisations (for example,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Leading by example</li> <li>✓ Organisation/Training/Sensitisation</li> </ul>

<p>veterans do not want to make way for younger ones)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Fatigue, and demands of time resulting in adequate commitment by feminists</li> <li>✓ Power struggles</li> <li>✓ Influence peddling</li> <li>✓ Inadequate governance structures (e.g. management of the organisation is centralised in one person)</li> <li>✓ Lack of cohesion</li> <li>✓ Misconceptions about feminism</li> <li>✓ Lack of transparency in the management of the organisation's finances</li> <li>✓ Lack of funding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Sharing experiences among women's organisations</li> <li>✓ Promoting quality leadership in the organisations</li> <li>✓ Using the skills of young feminists in Central Africa</li> <li>✓ Creating a young feminists blog in Central Africa, on the AFF site.</li> <li>✓ Sign partnership agreements between organisations</li> <li>✓ Creation of focal points</li> <li>✓ Tolerance (recognizing diversity)</li> </ul>
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<b>Action to be carried out after the Forum</b>	
<b>Publicise the Charter of Feminist principles</b>	<b>Maintain the exchange of information among young feminists in Central Africa.</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Make a summary of the Charter in the form of a brochure</li> <li>✓ Translation into a national language for easy understanding in rural communities.</li> <li>✓ Perform plays</li> <li>✓ Design leaflets</li> <li>✓ Harmonise the charter within the organisations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Creation of a blog</li> <li>✓ Regularly post information on the site</li> <li>✓ Networking between Anglophone and Francophone countries</li> </ul>

✓ Organise the focus group for the youth.	
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